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ABSTRACT

An important question about school financing is the possible financial consequences of school systems varying along a continuum from more to less political. This variation is "political relatedness," which is measured here with already available data from published sources. The impact of this political relatedness compared with other classes of influences on four school expenditures variables is investigated with multivariate techniques. In statistical explanation, political relatedness places second after environment. This finding is discussed in terms of understandings of influences on school policy and the need to investigate contemporary institutional structures as the outcome of historically antagonistic relations between classes in large cities. (Author)

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POLITICAL RELATEDNESS AND SCHOOL EXPENDITURES IN AMERICAN CITIES: A RESEARCH NOTE*

by

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*The authors are grateful to Thomas R. Dye for giving us the data of his 1967 study of city educational spending.

Political Relatedness and School Expenditures in American Cities: A Research Note

Brett W. Hawkins and Paul K. Villar

On Policy Studies

Among the issues currently enlivening scholars of public policy are: (A) specifying more or better indicators of the major nonvariable concepts (categories) "environment" and "political system." One motivation here appears to be to find indicators of "political system" such that past findings suggesting the political system to be of little explanatory importance will be qualified, if not superseded. (B) Another issue is dimensionalizing the major concepts. For example, there is interest in typologizing "policy output" into distributive and redistributive or dollar and non-dollar varieties. Using alternative language (from Hage), one can say that the dimensionalizing issue often involves a search for appropriate variable concepts to locate under the major nonvariable concepts. "Political system" is a nonvariable concept, or nominal category. One does not think in terms of more or less of the political system. However, one does appropriately think of more or less reformism in the structure of a political system, and of more or less equitable apportionment systems. (C) Another issue concerns the complete illumination of the process whereby environmental forces influence, or do not influence, policy decisions within the political system. In other words, there is concern with the "how of" linkages among the major concepts. This "how" is not revealed by macro analysis of whole political systems: micro-analysis within political systems is needed (Dye, 1968). (D) Still

another interest is in longitudinal analysis of policy. The complaint is voiced that cross-sectional research does not tell us anything about change over time. From cross-sectional data, for example, it is questionable to conclude that if expenditure levels are higher in states with greater economic resources then as states develop economically expenditure levels will rise (Hartwig).

This paper concentrates on a new variable concept relevant to explaining educational policy and subsumable under the nonvariable concept, political system. Using Coleman's framework, it also relects on the implications of our data for analysis of environment-system-policy linkage processes. Finally, this paper speculates on longitudinal policy analysis using not a time-series approach but a historical one.

The Educational Research Setting

The widespread concern for adequate school financing suggests a need to understand the historical determinants of spending for schools. Part of the debate about school financing has centered on the role as a determinant of institutionalized education itself. How important to generous spending levels is the autonomy of the schools traditionally demanded by schoolmen? Are "independent, non-political" schools more likely to get tax dollars? Not all education authorities believe so. Former Philadelphia Superintendent of schools, Mark Shedd, advocates placing administrative

control of the schools in the office of the mayor. Shedd believes that if the school superintendent were a member of the mayor's cabinet he would be in a better position to fight for a larger share of the tax dollar for the schools (Binzen). Salisbury, like Shedd, proposes a realignment of the schools whereby the school superintendent becomes a member of the mayor's cabinet. Salisbury (1967) suggests that under this alignment the schools could compete more directly and effectively with other city programs for available money.

These proposals and those in a similar vein call attention to the possible financial consequences of school systems varying along a political-nonpolitical continuum. That variation is measured, and its consequences are statistically assessed, in this study. The central questions here is the impact on expenditure levels of increasing degrees of politicization of the schools, or--what amounts to the same thing--increasing departures from the school's historically self-promoted autonomy. We hypothesize that the more politically related the schools, and hence the more open the schools are to participation by non-school forces in educational policy making, the higher the level of school expenditures. This hypothesis is supported by our data.

Our findings should encourage groups advocating a closer relationship between the schools and other city political institutions, or those simply attacking the claim of school autonomy. On the other hand, they do not support the position taken by many or most educators that schools function more effectively when wholly independent.

Data Base

We use data from Dye's sixty-seven city study (1967) as our initial data base. The addition of a new explanatory concept, however, calls for the addition of indicators specifically of that concept. Two indexes of political relatedness are used in this study, one more prominently than the other.

Dye's sample of only sixty-seven cities from 242 "central cities" in the nation's SMSA's was based on the availability of data on the environmental, structural, and policy variables of interest to him in his study. Besides the spotty nature of the desired data, another problem was the absence of coterminality of school districts with other political subdivisions. Dye's data included only those cities that were reasonably coterminous with the school district. These problems restricted his sample to sixty-seven cities.[1] The basic question of Dye's study is whether structural variables--by which is meant both characteristics of the general political system (such as form of city government) and of the school system (schoolboard selection method for example)--independently influence education outcomes. Or are educational outcomes primarily a function of the environmental characteristics of a city--its size, wealth, income, educational, occupation, and racial

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[1]The sixty-seven cities do not vary a great deal from the nation's two-hundred-forty-two central cities in 1960 in terms of median school years completed by population, white collar employment, median family income, and percent non-white. However, the sixty-seven cities are about twice the mean population. Hence, both studies confine their generalizations to large cities.

characteristics? Dye makes but does not stress in analysis a distinction between general political structure and school structure. This distinction is stressed in the current study.

Explanatory Concepts and their Indicators

Political structure, school structure, and the political relatedness of the schools are treated here as three separate explanatory concepts. In addition, the nonvariable concept' environment" is used as an explanatory concept. Each of the four concepts might be expected to help account for educational policy. Political scientists have generally found that environmental variables are more important than political structure in determining policy, particularly at the state level. In a recent longitudinal analysis, Hartwig (1972) finds that ten environmental characteristics of the states explain 82 percent of the variance in state and local expenditures per pupil between 1940 and 1960. Also, James, Kelly, and Garms (1966) find in their study of school expenditures in 107 large city school districts not a single political characteristic correlates with per pupil expenditures. Dye's 1967 study finds environmental variables more important to statistical explanation of city education expenditures that structural variables. It is of course customary to ask whether the formal organization of a political system affects policy variables like school expenditures. Additionally, a vast literature on the schools suggests the appropriateness of asking whether it makes any difference in expenditures that the school system is organized in one way or another. The same literaature also suggests, at least indirectly, investigating the impact on

expenditure levels of varying degrees of school political relatedness. To study this political relatedness, independent of the school structure and the political structure, we have specified multiple indicators of three phenomena: political system, school system, and political relatedness.

This study uses two indexes of political relatedness, one from existing published sources (see Figure 1.) and one based on a mail survey undertaken by the junior author of this paper. Primary emphasis is placed on the first index. The main index is conceptualized to reflect degrees of autonomy of the school system. In other words, the more the political relatedness of the schools the less their decision-making autonomy and the more the participation of non-school people in school decisions, including expenditure decisions. Some eight indicators of political relatedness were originally selected from published data (see Figure 1.), but for multivariate analysis with the other explanatory concepts (each of them being represented by 3 indicators) the three political relatedness indicators having the highest correlation (simple correlation coefficients) with this study's dependent variables were selected. The indicators thus selected were 1) whether the school board has independent or dependent fiscal powers; 2) whether voter eligibility in school bond referencdums is restricted to property owners (or otherwise restricted) or open to the general voter; and 3) whether school bond referendum elections are special elections or elections held at the time of general elections.

In our index from published sources, dependent fiscal powers is scored "more politically related," general voter eligibility is scored more politically related, and holding school bond referendums at the time of the general election is scored more politically-related. The dependent school board is scored more politically related because of its relationship with the local political structure. An independent school district is less answerable to the city's dominant political interests as represented by the mayor and his coalition. (Fiscally dependent and fiscally independent districts are defined by the NEA as follows: independent--a school system in which the state has delegated to the board of education complete authority in all matters pertaining to the financial management of the public schools, the board having the power to determine the amount of the budget, to levy or cause to be levied the taxes necessary to raise the required funds, to control the expenditure of those funds, and to acquire and hold property; dependent--a school system in which the decisions of the board of education in financial matters, including budget, revenues, expenditures, and acquisition of property, are subject to the approval of and control by municipal or other local governmental authority.)

The independent school district is an extreme manifestation of the claim of educators that education should stand alone as a distinct and non-political program of government.

The other two items in our political-relatedness index are scored "more political" on the principle that the greater the opportunity for the lower class voter and other than school interests

to participate in the electoral process relating to schools, the more politically related the schools. Thus those cities that do not place restrictions, such as property ownership, on the right to vote in school bond elections are scored "more politically related," as are districts that hold school bond elections at the same time as general elections.

Fifteen of the sixty-seven cities in our study place a property-ownership restriction on eligibility to vote in school board elections: Albuquerque, Amarillo, Austin, Dallas, Denver, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, New Orleans, Omaha, Rome (New York), Salt Lake City, San Benito (Texas), Syracuse, and Tucson.

One purpose of the mail survey was to ascertain from city informants and actors their disagreement or agreement with our interpretation of selected structural attributes of the schools. We are interested in whether mayors, school superintendents, school board presidents, and teachers' professional representatives agreed with our thinking about what constituted more and less political relatedness. Figure 1. reveals these informants and actors to be generally in agreement with our thinking. There is substantial agreement on the 3 items selected for the multivariate analysis--5, 7, and 8. We consider these results a favorable check on content validity.

(Insert Figure 1 About Here)

A different type of index of political relatedness comes from the survey of key informants in the 67 cities. The index as originally set up as a 4 item Likert scale, but on the basis of simple correlation analysis with the dependent variables, the three best items were selected for multi-variate analysis. These items were: 1) In my city the mayor would be a more effective spokesman for school interests before the state legislature than the professional educator, 2) Schools are political in the sense that they help maintain acceptable community norms, teach political values, and uphold personal mores, and 3) Schools in my city are more effective operating as a function separate from all other city government responsibilities. Agreement with the first two items and disagreement with the third was considered more political. This index taps perceptions of whether the schools are political, the impact of independence, and the impact of having mayor as a spokesman for school interests before the state legislature. These questions do not get at facts about the degree of political relatedness; rather they tap respondent support of certain assumptions basic to a case for greater political relatedness for city schools. What "more political" responses mean is actor sharing of beliefs that are supportive of more political relatedness. Obviously, the correlation of these beliefs with expenditures does not carry the same implication as the correlation of different degrees of political relatedness with expenditures. We do not claim that more key actor belief-sharing in this vein is likely to cause greater expenditure levels. In fact, at this juncture we do not claim much at all for the index and its

association with school spending--(see Table 1, last column) simply that certain attitudes about political relatedness by key actors are compatible with high levels of spending possibly because these attitudes exist in cities that are in fact more politically related. The analysis implied by this line of reasoning--more politically related actor attitudes should appear in more politically related cities--has not yet been undertaken.

Environment is another explanatory concept. Three indicators of environment were culled from an initial pool in the same way as the other sets of three. Environmental indicators thus selected are median family income, city size, and non-white population. The indicators of political structure are form of city government, type of election, and method of selecting the tax assessor (whether elected or appointed). The indicators of school structure are school board selection (whether appointed or elected), ward or at-large election of the school board, and whether the city has independent or dependent fiscal powers.[2]

The dependent variables selected from Dye's original study are per pupil expenditures, expenditures relative to community income, school tax rates, and local school support (the per cent of local school expenditures that comes from local taxes.

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[2]The last item appears also in the political-relatedness index from published sources. This is because, in our view, dependent fiscal powers is appropriately conceptualizable as an indicator of political-relatedness or as an indicator of school structure. If this procedure introduces a bias it is the same bias in both school structure and political-relatedness.

Findings

Table 1 reports multiple correlation coefficients--that is, the combined explanatory power of the three variables in each explanatory category--for the 67 cities. The mean of the multiple correlation coefficients for environment is .42. The mean of the multiple correlation coefficients for the political relatedness index is .34. The multiple correlation mean for political structure is .21 and for school structure, .18. Although environmental variables provide the best statistical explanation of school expenditures, the index of political-relatedness runs a close second--well ahead of political structure and school structure. Among the expenditure variables, political-relatedness is most related to per pupil expenditures and expenditures for schools relative to community income. But it is also of some importance in explaining the educational effort that a city makes.

(Insert Table 1 About Here)

Table 2 reports multiple-partial correlation coefficients between the set of indicators of each explanatory concept and each dependent variable, controlling for the other sets of explanatory indicators.

(Insert Table 2 About Here)

The use of multiple-partial correlation coefficients allows us to test the independent explanatory power of environment, political structure, school structure, and political relatedness. In other words, it allows us to control for the effects of each class of explanatory variable.. For example, the first column of Table 2 reports the independent association between the three environmental indicators and the policy

output indicators while controlling for the influence of three political structure indicators, three school structure indicators, and the three indicators of political relatedness. Here again the environmental variables emerge as the principal statistical explanation of educational spending in large cities, with the indicators of political relatedness coming in second. Thus although environment appears to be most influential in determining school expenditure levels, the degree of political relatedness of school systems also appears important in shaping educational expenditures. On the other hand, political structure and school structure in these data influence school expenditures to a lesser degree. The mean of all multiple-partials under the environment is .43; the mean under political relatedness is .30; the mean under political structure is .23; and the mean under school structure is .16.

The statistical evidence is that political relatedness is second only to environment in explanatory importance.

Summary

While confirming earlier analyses that environment emerges first in the statistical explanation of school spending, and that characteristics of the school structure and the political structure (especially the former) are of much less statistical importance in the explanation of expenditures, this study suggests a considerable explanatory importance of departure of the school system from political independence. These findings, with admittedly crude indicators of the central explanatory concept--political relatedness, suggest that the more politically related the schools, the greater the school spending in large cities.

With better indicators of political relatedness, a type of attribute of the political system, the results might be more dramatic.

Some Broader Conflict Implications

By their very nature macro level models used here and elsewhere in comparative policy analysis are unsuitable for accessing how environmental and political system influences affect public policy. They only enable researchers to say whether each class of influences does affect policy and how much. The manner, process, or how much influence--or what happens within the "black box" of the political system--calls for analysis of individuals and groups. In our view so does the explanatory concept, political relatedness. As a concept, political relatedness suggests the facilitation of input to the school decision process by non-school authorities and lower class citizens. It suggests this because political relatedness means an opening of the decision process, a loss of decision making autonomy for school elites. It also suggests structural arrangements facilitative of input by lower class citizens; that is, an absence of property-related restrictions on voter eligibility in bond elections and the holding of bond elections during general elections when the lower class turnout is highest. Subjecting the school budget to approval for general local government authorities also suggests a decline in autonomy for school elites and the possibility of input by other than middle class citizens.

Our point is this. The concept, indicators, and findings concerning political relatedness all suggest the possible importance of historical class conflict over the schools. The absence of political relatedness for the schools, or in relative terms less political relatedness,

suggests historical victories for middle and upper class strata, victories that are reflected in such institutional structures as an independent school budget, property or other restrictions in voting, and the holding of elections when the lower classes might be expected to turn out least. The presence of political relatedness, or more political relatedness, suggests the presence of input from other than middle class strata.

This line of thinking points to a need to study, historically, class conflict as it relates to authoritative structures that have screening implications for input by lower class citizens. In other words, what our data suggest needs illumination is the way in which more and less politically related structures are rooted in historical class conflicts. Our data simply show that more and less politically related structures have policy consequences; the data do not reveal how these structures were shaped by past conflicts in the urban environment (between or among classes).

We hypothesize that structural characteristics of big city educational systems facilitative of demand input by the lower classes--that is, democratizing arrangements--make class conflict more likely. If one wants to control, guide, or manage community conflict, then he should consider that democratizing structures facilitative of lower class input may stimulate class conflict. Indeed, it may be that class conflict, or the advancement of lower class interests, was anticipated by middle class opponents of politicized school structures and opposed in part because of this anticipation. Looked at

the other way around, structural attributes of school systems that have the effect of containing conflict may also be those structures that screen out the effective participation of lower class groups. What we are suggesting, in short, is a dilemma in which democratizing the school system conduces to class conflict over the schools. The notion that democratization may bring class conflict, and that to use structural arrangements to contain or manage community conflict may have the consequence of de-democratizing the public schools, needs to be examined in a historical perspective.

Coleman (1957) is concerned with democratic processes and majority control of the community, as are many others. But Coleman is also concerned with those forces that restrict, constrain or manage community controversies when they break out. The need, as we see it, is to face the real possibility that majority control of the schools requires the removal of conflict-constraining structures; and that removal in turn raises the likelihood of class conflict, including antagonistic and virulent conflict.

What we are suggesting, theoretically, is the need to assess contemporary institutional arrangements as the outcome of historical and antagonistic relationships between classes in large cities. We suggest this because the political relatedness index represents the notion of lower class accessibility to influence. Politically related school structures may be seen as one type of residue of this historical conflict that has survived to the present. We think that studies finding influences such as those we

call political relatedness to be important in shaping public policies, suggest a need to study how class interests are translated into policies; that is, the process by which victorious classes obtain structural and other kinds of benefits in the political system.

FIGURE 1

Results of the Questionnaire Validation of the
Political Relatedness Index
from Published Data

All Items	Respondent Validation[a]	
	n	%
1. School Board Selection (<u>appointed</u> or elected)	69	59
2. School Board Election (<u>partisan</u> or nonpartisan)	104	87
3. School Board Election Districts (<u>wards</u> or at-large)	82	75
4. School Election Separateness (during <u>general</u> elections or special)	78	67
(5) School Fiscal Powers (<u>dependent</u> or independent)	86	80
6. Voting Restrictions in Bond Referendums (<u>Simple majority</u> or extraordinary majority)	105	91
(7) Voter Eligibility for Bond Referendums (<u>general voter</u> or property restrictions)	107	83
(8) Bond Referendum Elections (<u>general election</u> or special)	78	67

a. The percentages are representative of only those respondents who agreed or disagreed. Neutral responses were not counted as part of the total.

b. Both school elections and bond referendas were in one question, therefore the total and percentage is the same for "indicators" four and eight.

( ) Items used in the multivariate analysis.

<u> </u> Underlining means "scored politically related." Our rationale in item #1 is that an appointed board is closer to the mayor's coalition.

TABLE 1.

Total Explanatory Power of Environment, Political Structure, School Structure, and Political Relatedness: With Four Policy Measures

Expenditure Levels Expenditure Levels	Environment[a]	Political[b] Structure	School[c] Structure	Index of Poli-[d] tical relatedness	Key Actor Belief in Political Relatedness[a]
Per Pupil Expenditures	.57	.16	.21	.43	.42
Expenditures Relative to Income	.42	.22	.28	.41	.39
School Tax Rate	.35	.15	.08	.18	.21
Local School Support	.32	.30	.14	.35	.26

NOTE: Figures are multiple correlation coefficients for 67 cities.

a. Environmental Variables: median family income; percent non-white population; city size.
b. Political Structure Variables: form of government; type of election; appointed or elected tax assessor.
c. School Structure Variables: appointed or elected school board; ward or at-large elected school board; independent-dependent fiscal powers.
d. Political Relatedness Variables: dependent fiscal powers; general eligibility requirements for bond voting; general election for bond referendums.
e. Key Actor Belief in Political Relatedness Variables: mayor as school spokesman; schools as a separate function; schools political.

TABLE 2

Independent Explanatory Power of Environment, Political Structure, School Structure, and Political Relatedness*

	Environment	Political Structure	School Structure	Index of Political Relatedness
Per Pupil Expenditures	.60	.16	.15	.37
Expenditures Relative to Income	.51	.27	.27	.47
School Tax Rate	.34	.21	.07	.11
Local School Support	.27	.28	.14	.23

Figures are multiple-partial correlation coefficients. Variables are the same as in Table 1.

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